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March 17, 2009

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Department of Veterans Affairs, Central Office
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

As the elected representative of roughly 55,000 Americans who have served this nation's Armed Forces and now call New York's 26th Congressional District home, I believe this government has a moral obligation to keep the promises it has made to our veterans.

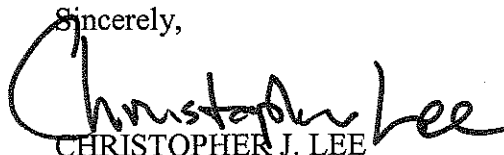
That is why I was deeply concerned to learn that during a recent appearance before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, you confirmed the Administration's intent to pursue policies in the budget for the coming fiscal year that would require veterans to use private insurance to pay for the treatment of service-connected injuries. This severely misguided proposal is an affront to this nation's longstanding tradition of providing for the care of the men and women who have put themselves in harm's way in its defense. What's worse, it would ultimately result in veterans paying out of their own pockets in the form of co-pays, deductibles, and higher premiums. Attempting to achieve budgetary reforms on the backs of our wounded warriors is completely unacceptable.

To date, no fewer than 11 veterans service organizations have brought to you similar objections. They have also expressed the very valid concern that some employers, especially small businesses, might be reluctant to hire veterans with service-connected disabilities due to the higher costs of their health care benefits. There could not be a worse time to make it more difficult for our veterans to find gainful employment.

I am joining these service organizations and members of Congress on both sides of the aisle in asking you to drop consideration of these ill-advised proposals. Our wounded warriors and their families deserve every assurance that this government will always honor its obligations to them, in both letter and spirit.

I appreciate your time and consideration, and look forward to hearing from you on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER J. LEE

Member of Congress